

# **Fact Finder – September 10-16, 2012**

## **South Lake Tahoe charity confirms they're part of council bribery investigation**

**September 10, 2012**

There are new developments in the bribery case involving a South Lake Tahoe city councilwoman and a former pot club owner. The Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation now confirms they're part of the investigation and have been questioned by investigators – that's a group Councilwoman Angela Swanson is on the board of.

This comes after suspect Gino DiMatteo donated a little more than a thousand dollars to the foundation. He is currently behind bars being charged with bribing a city council member. Right now the DA's office won't say what the possible bribe was, but last week News 4 uncovered a letter thanking DiMatteo for his donation. We also told you there were rumors the councilwoman was telling people around town she got him to give the money to the group.

The charity originally declined comment, but after our story aired, they confirmed with News 4 - Angela Swanson and the organization's president did meet with DiMatteo about a possible donation - and the group is part of the DA's investigation.

This donation comes right around the same time Swanson made a vote to keep DiMatteo's pot club from being closed down. Swanson has said she did nothing that would violate the trust of voters and an attorney for DiMatteo confirms the donation but says there was no wrong doing associated with it.

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## **Investigation launched on how felon got SLT pot club permit**

**September 11, 2012**

An internal investigation is being launched at South Lake Tahoe City Hall because of new questions about if a former pot club owner should have actually been issued a business permit by the City Council. This after his hidden criminal past is exposed.

Gino DiMatteo is being charged with bribing a city councilmember. Among his other counts is being a felon in possession of ammunition, The problem is that a News 4 review of city code about pot clubs shows people with felonies are not supposed to operate or even work in medical marijuana shops.

“I was stunned,” Mayor Pro-Tem Tom Davis said. “The background check was done with Gino DiMatteo and it came up clear.”

But DiMatteo's gun possession related felony was committed under an alias - Sergio Ottomanelli.

A News 4 public records request shows that name was not listed on the permit application - only Gino DiMatteo is there.

"There's a piece missing in this with a mystery here that I'm going to get to the bottom of. Why was he not using his real name," Davis said.

Davis has asked for an internal investigation at the City. He says they should know more by next week.

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### **Dozens of Recommendations in VA Hospital Report September 12, 2012**

An investigation by the Office of the Medical Inspector in Washington D-C focused on a wide range of concerns at the Reno V-A Hospital which were brought up by members of the American Federation of Government Employees Union. The issues ranged from pain management to staffing to the availability of counseling services for veterans.

Jeanine Swigman is the vice president for the hospital workers union, local 2152. She was quick to weigh in:

"There is a systemic lack of oversight and inability to adhere to their own directives", Swigman Says.

The final report has not been released to the public, but News 4 received a copy exclusively from the union which was only able to obtain it through a public records request.

Among the findings in the report:

That the hospital is not providing pain management oversight for patients as required by the Veterans Health Administration.

The report recommends the hospital develop a plan to improve access to pain management services.

The VA says all requests for pain medication will now be addressed by a pain management panel within approved timelines. Those timelines can vary depending on the case.

The report also found that last summer, physical therapy was critically understaffed at the V-A hospital, causing delays for patients who were forced to obtain outpatient therapy services.

The report recommends the V-A develop and implement a comprehensive plan to account for staff fluctuations.

In response, the V-A says it has hired two additional physical therapists to improve staffing.

And in the Community Living Center, what is essentially a nursing home at the V-A, the O-M-I report found a lack of resident activities and an overall lack of physical activity for nearly all C-L-C residents and issued six recommendations to improve staffing.

"The reason why this concerns me, if you've got an older person who doesn't use their muscles they become deconditioned. Their muscles waste away," said Dr. Robert Mitten, a psychologist and steward for the union.

The V-A says it is addressing the issue at the Community Living Center by focusing more attention on developing specific plans for the therapeutic, physical and social needs of these patients.

The O-M-I report also found that one veteran who was battling cancer had his treatment unnecessarily delayed for 6 to 8 weeks after management requested a second opinion from an outside consultant. That patient later died when the cancer became inoperable. Though the report does not say the delay caused the veteran's death. The union, however, is convinced there is a connection.

"A delay of 6 to 8 weeks. Make your own conclusions," Swigman told News 4.

The report recommends the hospital set a time standard when requesting care outside the V-A system and also discuss the reasons for the delay with the veteran's family.

The V-A says a new time standard has been put into place when it comes to requests for care outside the v-a system. Again, those standards vary depending on the case.

News 4 contacted the Office of the Medical Inspector and the V-A Hospital, neither was willing to speak with us on camera about the report.

V-A spokesman Darin Farr told us the reason they won't is because of privacy concerns, and the fact that the report covers such a wide range of issues.

But the union doesn't buy that explanation.

"I think the facts are just too damning. And the V-A doesn't have an answer for this." said union president John Copeland.

In all there are 53 recommendations laid out in this report aimed at improving the quality of health care at the V-A hospital. Union members say they hope those recommendations are adopted by management. But they also say they feel the changes need to start at the top and say they say the next step is asking members of congress for help in getting that done.

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## **Former pot club owner out of jail 12 days after arrest September 13, 2012**

The former pot club owner who prosecutors say bribed a South Lake Tahoe City Councilmember is now getting out of jail - 12 days after his arrest.

A judge gave Gino DiMatteo clearance today to post \$100,000 after proof was presented the money will not come from illegal activities.

Prosecutors were also supposed to publicly present basic evidence for the first time today on the charges against DiMatteo, but the defense team asked that portion of the hearing be pushed back so they have more time to prepare an argument.

A defense attorney would not let Irene DiMatteo go on camera, but she told News 4 the prosecutors seem to believe the alleged bribe is a donation the couple made to the Lake Tahoe Education Foundation. That's because City Councilmember Angela Swanson was in the room when they turned over the money.

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## **Reed High Football Battles Opponents and Poor Field Conditions September 12, 2012**

When the Reed High School Raiders take the field this year they do so under conditions that are less than ideal. Reed was the Northern Regional Champion last year but the field they play on ranks among the worst in our area. Reed High School athletic director Ron Coombs admits the conditions on the school's football and soccer field are far from ideal. The school is almost 40 years old. And facilities like this one are showing their age.

"The biggest concern is areas where the grass is struggling to come through," Coombs told News 4 during a tour of the facility.

That means players run, catch and tackle on bare spots like this where the grass is simply not growing due to poor drainage, our hot summer weather, and simply, use. Coombs says they shut the field down last May and started a comprehensive maintenance plan when they realized the situation was at a critical point.

"We have spent an enormous amount of time and money to get his facility playable. To get it to a point where it is safe," he told us.

Coombs says the field is now safe to play on, but the conditions are not on par with other schools.

Damonte Ranch, the newest high school in the district has a first class football field and received extra money from the district to build it because it is designated as a regional play-off site. But

because the field was built at the same time the school was built, the district can't tell us how much it spent on the field portion.

McQueen High School installed a new artificial turf field in 2006 at a cost of more than half a million dollars thanks in large part to an aggressive fundraising and booster program.

Joe Gabica oversees the planning and development of capital projects for the school district. We asked him if its fair that kids in newer areas have such better facilities than students at older schools.

"I don't know that its fair. Damonte was done for a specific purpose. It's a regional stadium. McQueen was fundraising. All of the other facilities are pretty close to the same thing," Gabika says.

But clearly not all schools are on an equal playing field when it comes to funding. We did a little more research and found McQueen actually received \$300,000 in bond money from the school district to build its field.

The district says the money was originally set aside for a school expansion project that never materialized. The school board then decided that \$300,000 could be used instead to help pay for the new football field at McQueen.

But News 4 has also learned bond money will no longer be available for any schools in the district because lower property values have cut the amount of tax revenue available to pay off those bonds.

That's a major source of revenue the district depends on for capital projects that will soon disappear when the current bonds expire in November.

"It's a huge hurdle and never in my time have I seen this. Its zero. After November we will have no additional revenue sources," said Elizabeth Wright, director of accountability for the school district.

Another challenge at Reed, when it comes to maintenance, there is no money set aside for specific schools. Instead it is simply divided up on a priority basis. And football fields often take low priority.

"If we have to make a decision to re-sod a field or put a new roof on a school, we have to make some tough decisions but it will be the roof," Gabika said.

On the bright side, major improvements have been made here at reed to the softball and baseball fields. Parent support and fundraising have helped make these projects happen and Ron Coombs says they have a clear goal in mind for their next project.

"To get this field in better condition than it is now," he says.

In the meantime, the Reed Raiders hope to continue their winning tradition. With the hope that someday the quality of their field will match the quality of their play.

The Reed High athletic staff is working on putting together a fundraising poker night at the grand sierra in the near future to help raise money for a new field. We'll let you know when they have a specific date set for the event.

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